

Conservation Districts

Neighborhood Conservation Districts are zoning overlay designations, used as management tools to address the appropriateness of new and infill construction in both residential and commercial neighborhoods.

The development of Neighborhood Conservation Districts (NCD) in San Antonio responds to the 1997 Master Plan and 1998 Community Action Revitalization Group (CRAG) recommendations. The NCD also addresses neighborhood concerns about protection of architectural integrity and neighborhood character for new residential and commercial construction.

Neighborhood Conservation Districts identify geographic areas in the context of a broader streetscape. Neighborhood defining elements are more than just the age of structures. Local identity and perception, enhanced through neighborhood-based design standards, prove to be as important as architectural style and character.

Neighborhood Conservation District designation, whether used to protect distinctive architecture or natural features, stabilize property values, or deter incompatible development, is a neighborhood revitalization planning tool that provides:

- a more predictable course of development,
- an efficient building permit process without the necessity of a Commission review, and
- a means of self-determination for residential and commercial neighborhood organizations.

What are the benefits of NCD designation?

Neighborhood Conservation District designation protects and strengthens the desirable and unique physical features, design characteristics, and recognized identity, charm and flavor of neighborhoods. It offers a level of “protection” for property values, helping to prevent blight caused by incompatible, insensitive development.

Does a NCD affect my taxes?

NO. Neighborhood character within a NCD will generally maintain a higher level of stability; however, NCD designation does not initiate tax increases. This is handled through the Bexar Appraisal District.

Does a NCD affect the use of my property?

NO. A Neighborhood Conservation District is an “overlay” zoning designation, and as such, does not affect the use of property. The underlying base zoning remains intact. *(example: in an R-2 (NCD) zoning classification, the R-2 regulates zoning use)*

Is a NCD for residential or commercial properties?

Both. The boundaries may include:

- residential properties
- commercial properties, or
- residential & commercial properties

How do I know if my neighborhood or commercial district is eligible for a NCD?

Generally, the criteria for designation includes:

- a minimum of one blockface, and
- at least 75% of the structures in the area are at least 25 years old, and
- at least 75% of the area is presently improved, and
- the area possesses distinctive features that create a cohesive, identifiable setting, character or association.

Who is able to initiate a NCD?

There are several ways to initiate the process. Property owners may initiate the process through a petition of either:

- property owners representing 51% of the land area within the district, or
- 51% of the property owners within the district.

The City's Planning Department can also initiate the process if:

- a Neighborhood or Community Plan has already identified the NCD as a preferred option, or
- a City or community targeted revitalization program has identified a NCD need.

Is my neighborhood already designated?

San Antonio has many neighborhoods that are designated as either local historic districts, or are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These designations are different than a NCD designation, and maintain different standards.

If my neighborhood is eligible for Historic District status, should we consider a NCD designation?

NO. If a neighborhood maintains the necessary architectural or historical integrity to be eligible for a historic district, it would be encouraged to pursue historic district designation, rather than a NCD designation. However, the neighborhood property owners would generally make that decision.

Are there design standards required for NCD designation?

YES. One of the most important components of the NCD designation is a set of established design standards. The standards, however, are developed by property owners, unique to each NCD, and determined as part of the application process.

What are design standards?

Required design standards include characteristics such as building height, size, massing, principal elevation features, lot size/coverage, parking, setbacks, roof line/pitch and paving. Optional standards might include features such as signage, building materials, landscaping and natural features, fences/walls, building orientation, driveway and sidewalk location.

Who decides what design standards are important for my neighborhood?

The property owners located within the NCD determine the "character-defining" elements that are important to them.

Do the design standards apply to new construction or rehabilitation of existing properties?

Both. Although the design standards primarily affect those properties where new construction will occur. Rehabilitation projects (beyond ordinary maintenance and repair) that affect the street facade, will also be required to adhere to the design standards.

If my property is in a NCD, will I have to rehabilitate my property to conform to the design standards?

No. Property owners are not required to rehabilitate their property upon designation. However, if they elect to rehabilitate their property, they would be required to conform to the NCD standards.

What if I can't afford the requirements of the design standards?

The standards are determined by the same property owners who will be using them, therefore, the local aesthetic and economic conditions become part of the determining factors for the design standards. With the exception of specific "character-defining" building materials determined unique to the neighborhood, the design standards generally address the broader elements that define the streetscape.

Will the design standards address paint color?

NO. Repainting is considered ordinary maintenance and repair, and is not regulated.

Is demolition allowed in a NCD?

Unless a structure already maintains a protected status, a demolition permit application will be processed in the same manner as any other demolition permit application.

Once a NCD is established, how do I get my project approved? Is a commission presentation required?

The NCD review process is an administrative process, with no commission review. A project may be forwarded to the NCD staff via the standard building permit process, or an applicant may bring the project plans directly to the NCD staff. A Certificate of Compliance (CoC) is issued if the project conforms to the design standards. If not, the applicant is issued a Notification of Non-Compliance, and may reapply after conforming to the standards, or appeal the administrative decision to the Board of Adjustment.

How long does administrative review take?

The NCD review process provides for an efficient turnaround period. However, if project plans change after the CoC is issued, it is voided, and the review process would be initiated again.

Is there a charge for NCD project review?

NO. There is no additional charge for NCD review.

For more information on the Neighborhood Conservation District program, call the Neighborhood and Urban Design Division of the Planning Department, 207-7873.

Mahncke Park Neighborhood Planning Team Suggestions for Neighborhood Conservation District Standards

Commercial properties:

- Limitations on height and setback
- Vehicular access design to minimize impact on residential streets
- Parking location and landscaping of parking areas
- Buffering between uses, especially between commercial and residential
- Screening of service areas, mechanical equipment and dumpsters
- Prohibition of off-premises signs (with exception for neighborhood businesses without Broadway frontage)
- Prohibition of temporary on-premises signs beyond a specified number, height and size
- Prohibition of barbed- and razor-wire

Residential properties:

- Limitation of height to 45 feet (variances may be supported under limited circumstances with consideration of location and respect for the surrounding neighborhood)
- Density
- Buffering between different densities and uses
- Parking areas
- Lighting (should be screened to avoid impact on adjacent residences)
- Screening of parking and service areas of multi-family dwellings